

Songs of Praise 2025 Notes

This week we celebrate our annual Songs of Praise Sunday. This is not only an opportunity to learn about the congregation's favourite worship songs, but also to think about worship itself: what it is and what it's for.

This year's text is Psalm 47. It is a celebration of God's reign over the earth, and an encouragement for all peoples and nations to join with Israel to worship God together.

The Psalm identifies the fundamental reason why God deserves worship and praise: he is King of the world. Unlike other kings and rulers, however, who come to rule over lands that already exist, God is the *true* King of the world because he created the world from *nothing*. We - and everything in our world - owe our existence to God alone working through natural laws (they are called laws because they are *commandments* of a *king*!) to shape and fashion us. Because he is the creator and sustainer of all things, he is worthy of worship and praise.

The relation between Israel, and the nations of the earth, and the Church is slightly different today, however, than when the Psalm was first written. When the Psalmist writes

He subdued peoples under us,
and nations under our feet

He is likely thinking of the military victories of David and Solomon, which led to Israel being in physical and political control of some of the nations surrounding it. Yet as the focus of the Psalm on *worship* makes clear, and as will become even clearer in Jesus, the *true* victory of Israel is that the overwhelming majority of nations - whether Jewish, Christian or Muslim - now worship the God of Israel. In this way, the Psalm has been largely fulfilled, and will one day be *fully* fulfilled, when 'every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'

Finally, we should not miss the strong tone of *joy* in the Psalm. Worship is not a duty to some scary ruler in this reading but something that erupts out of us. It is something that is unavoidable and inevitable when we understand who God is and what God has done for us. As one of our hymns this week puts it, God's power and goodness 'finds an echo in my soul. How can I keep from singing?'

Psalm 47

1

Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.

2

For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome,
a great king over all the earth.

3

He subdued peoples under us,
and nations under our feet.

4

He chose our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom he loves. *Selah*

5

God has gone up with a shout,
the Lord with the sound of a trumpet.

6

Sing praises to God, sing praises;
sing praises to our King, sing praises.

7

For God is the king of all the earth;
sing praises with a psalm.

8

God is king over the nations;
God sits on his holy throne.

9

The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.
For the shields of the earth belong to God;
he is highly exalted.

1. Read the Psalm to yourself. What emotions might have been going through the Psalmist as he wrote it, or as people sung it in the Temple?
2. What do you think worship is for? Is it one thing or many things?
3. Has there ever been a time when you've been moved to worship outwith church?
4. According to the Psalmist, *why* should the nations worship God?
5. Consider this verse:

The princes of the peoples gather
as the people of the God of Abraham.

What do you think this verse might be saying about the role of worship in bringing people together?

7. Activity: take time to think of, and write down, some of your favourite lines from hymns. Then share them with the group and say why you like them